

## Testimony Concerning S.B.1088

Dear Members of the Committee:

Thank you for considering my statement.

My name is Robert Gorman. I am a married father of 3 (grown) children living with my wife in Manchester, CT.

My sister Ann was born in 1945 and has resided in Southbury Training School since age 4. Ann was born with a “birthing injury” which was caused during her delivery by a forceful use of forceps which pushed in the back of her skull. This caused a severe brain injury, cerebral palsy and “profound” impairment. She was placed in Southbury when her physician informed my father that taking care of her at home was going to kill my mother. As devastating as it was for my parents to remove Ann from her home they found some relief/comfort in knowing that Southbury was such a highly regarded residential placement. Ann cannot speak; she cannot read or write; she cannot feed herself; she cannot clothe herself; she cannot go to the bathroom on her own. She can only walk/shuffle with significant assistance which includes a walker to which she is tethered and which requires constant assistance by a helpful person. Ann requires 24 hour care and 24 hour attention. She could not be a more fragile, vulnerable person.

Southbury Training School has been Ann’s home. Its staff is kind, attentive and loving to my sister. One or two of the staff there knit clothing for her on their own time and always ensure that if her rocker requires painting or repair it is done; if she could use a new “country music” CD they get her one; if she seems agitated they know why; if she is happy they know why; if one or two of them to whom she has grown very close walks away from her to get something for her she gets anxious and a little agitated due to this, albeit minor, “separation anxiety”. If Ann has a scratch on her or a bruise on her ankle I receive a call from either the nurse stationed in her cottage, the supervisor of the cottage or even the physician on staff. If she needs to go for testing or any kind of medical care I receive a call from the on-site staff physician. When Ann had cancer surgery several years ago I was consulted by the staff physician who then made sure I was consulted by the surgeon of the hospital. Even though my other sister and I were at the hospital during surgery, Ann was accompanied to the hospital, not just by the transportation staff but by a loving staff member who stayed the entire time even though it was her day off.

Most of the staff in Ann’s cottage have been involved in patient/resident care for many years. They are fairly well-paid with good benefits as they are state employees. They clearly are conscientious about the care they give. Care of patients like Ann is demanding and challenging. It is not something anyone can provide. Most of the residents in Anne’s cottage are as vulnerable and fragile as she. If I stop by the cottage without calling in advance, the care and attentiveness I find is the same as if I am there with an appointment – no one has to “dress-up” or change their behavior for a visit. Ann is brought out to an off-

site day program most days of the week. There she is surrounded by other individuals, only some of whom are from Southbury. They take her in her wheelchair on frequent outings. Even though Ann is incapable of understanding much around her everyone acknowledges that the change of scenery is good for her. When she returns to Southbury from the “day program” she is cared for by people who know to check to see if she had a good day and is still thriving after the day out. (One staff member actually does not like to see Ann go out for the day as she misses her as one would miss a daughter.)

The thought of privatizing Ann’s 24 hour care is terrifying. Having her care be subject to “market forces” seems unconscionable. I understand that every group home has to be assessed on its own merits however they are often in a state of flux. They do not have the kind of staffing or the stability in staffing that Southbury does. There is much turnover in staff in many of the homes. Obviously there is a reason for that. One reason is that they do not provide the wages and benefits that the State does. I am personally familiar with experiences of some of the group homes’ employees. I have learned of employees working as a part-time job running a cottage for a shift with one other part-time worker with very little training and when significant difficulties arise they learn that the off-duty head of the cottage has turned off his phone and the supervisor who is supposed to be on-call does not answer the phone. I have learned of physical intimidation as a means of exercising control over vulnerable residents. I have learned of insufficient training and supervision. I have learned of inadequate staffing for very vulnerable residents. Many of the group homes are completely out of the public eye.

I have never learned of any mistreatment of my sister or her fellow residents in her cottages at Southbury. They are under constant scrutiny at STS. If a staff member misses a shift another staff worker works an extra shift; they do not utilize “temp workers”. If my sister were to be mistreated or abused or made to sit in a wet diaper for eight hours she could not help herself, nor could she tell us. When she is at STS she never has to tell us of those things, as they do not happen.

I understand the motivation for “placing” persons with disabilities in a community setting. It is wonderful that some such individuals can be accompanied on a walk downtown or around a mall or a park and interact with the community, which can become their milieu. Unfortunately that is only a positive option for some. For people such as my sister this is not an option. Her milieu, her family are those in her immediate setting which is Southbury Training School where she has lived for 65 years. It seems most unfortunate that at this time some people who advocate for persons with disabilities are advocating for the closure of STS. It is so unfortunate that some feel they have to pit the very vulnerable against the extremely vulnerable.

I hope that those who vote on STS’ future will spend meaningful time there to see the care that is provided to the residents. I hope they go and see the bonds that have been so

obviously forged between the residents and many of the staff. I wish STS could be opened for more individuals who seem to be very much in need of a residential placement.

I would ask that you not pass a bill calling for the closure of STS. I ask that you not pass S.B. No.1088. I would ask that you respect the residents at STS as people and not as a burden and respect their need to stay in their home with the people who treat them so well. They have been afflicted with a station in life that we would not wish on anyone. I would ask that you at least allow them the comfort and care that comes with staying in their home.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Robert J Gorman Jr.